

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9687

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1366

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS 3

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL LOPEZ

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 1348, (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1353

1. I HAD CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL LOPEZ THIS MORNING. I FOUND HIM IN A CORDIAL MOOD BUT HE APPEARED TO BE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRESENT SITUATION. MY IMPRESSION IS THAT HE IS NEARING THE VERGE OF RESIGNATION, AND THAT ANY ADDITIONAL PRESSURE MAY CAUSE HIM TO TAKE THAT STEP.

2. HE ADMITTED THAT THE APPOINTMENT OF COLONEL MELGAR AS CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCEW WAS A COSMETIC MEASURE TO MAKE IT APPEAR THAT LOPEZ HAD NOT BEEN STRIPPED OF POWER. LOPEZ STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN LEFT WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOVERNING BUT THAT IN REALITY, AFTER THE EVENTS OF LAST WEEK, HE NO LONGER HAS FULL AUTHORITY TO GOVERN. IN GENERAL, HE SPOKE AS IF HE WERE ALREADY REMOVED FROM OFFICE.

3. HE COMMENTED THAT HE IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WHERE THE NEW MILITARY GROUP WILL LEAD THE COUNTRY BECAUSE THERE IS NO CLEAR LEADER. HE BELIEVES THAT THEY WOULD NOT PUT MELGAR IN HIS PLACE IF HE RESIGNS OR IS TOPPLED. HE SAID THAT THE NEW OFFICER GROUP IS YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED IN GOVERNING. LOPEZ OBSERVED THAT THEY COULD BE MOVED

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TO ADOPT MEASURES ON THE BASIS OF EMOTION AND

SHIFTING OPINION RATHER THAN ON THE BASIS OF EXPERIENCE. HE SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED TO THEM AND HAD GOTTEN THEM TO AGREE TO A DECLARATION (REFTEL A) ON POLICIES OF GOVERNMENT. HE WAS NOT SURE, HOWEVER, THAT THEY HAD THE CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT THE COMMITMENTS CONTAINED IN THE DECLARATION.

4. HE STATED THAT ALL THE STORIES ABOUT THE UB BRIBE ARE FALSE. HE POINTED OUT THAT "EVERYONE KNOWS HOW GOVERNMENT IS CARRIED ON IN LATIN AMERICA" BUT DENIED THAT HE HIMSELF WAS INVOLVED IN BRIBERY. HE SAID THE STORIES ABOUT HIM WERE THE WORK OF HIS ENEMIES. HE WAS PARTICULARLY DISTURBED ABOUT THE STATEMENT IN THE AP NEWS STORY THAT THE U.S. EMBASSY HAD OBTAINED INFORMATION ON THE BRIBE AND HAD TRANSMITTED IT TO THE DEPARTMENT. HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT THE STATEMENT COULD BE CLARIFIED BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE HERE BELIEVE THAT THE EMBASSY'S INFORMATION ON ANY SITUATION IS GENERALLY CORRECT. HE SAID THAT THE CURRENT ALLEGATIONS COULD BE USED TO TOPPLE HIM. HE DID NOT APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND CLEARLY THE MECHANISM BY WHICH THE STORY BECAME PUBLIC SO I EXPLAINED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE PRESENT AND I SPECIFICALLY DENIED THAT THE EMBASSY HAD BEEN THE SOURCE OF THE ALLEGATIONS.

5. COMMENT: I BELIEVE THAT LOPEZ' DAYS ARE NUMBERED AND THAT HIS RESIGNATION OR REMOVAL WILL ALSO LEAD TO A COMPLETE CABINET CHANGE. AT THIS STAGE THERE SEEMS LITTLE THAT HE CAN DO TO STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION GIVEN THE BRIBERY STORY THAT CAN AND WILL BE USED AGAINST HIM. HIS BELIEF THAT THE STORY CAN BE STALLED OR REFUTED SEEMS UNTENABLE TO ME. I SHARE HIS CONCERN ABOUT WEAKNESSES OF THE "LT. COLONELS GROUP." IT IS NOT COMPLETELY UNIFIED BY IDEOLOGY AND THERE DO NOT SEEM TO BE ANY OUTSTANDING LEADERS. THEREFORE, THEIR REACTIONS TO SITUATIONS AND THE POLICIES THEY ADOPT COULD WELL BE INFLUENCED BY PASSING EVENTS AND SNAP DECISIONS RATHER THAN A SERIOUS EFFORT TO TACKLE EFFECTIVELY THE SERIOUS PROBLEMS WHICH CONFRONT THE COUNTRY.

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